

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

ON THE OCCASION OF

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2007 YEAR BOOK

AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY, NSW

24 JANUARY 2007

Ms Susan Linacre

Ms Sue Phillips

Mayor George Newhouse

Mr Ron Rankin AM

Other Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's a pleasure to be here today to launch another landmark Australian Bureau of Statistics publication, the 2007 Year Book.

In August I was privileged to visit the ABS headquarters in Canberra as a prelude to this year's Census of Population and Housing. What a massive operation. And what a tribute to the Bureau that it was carried out with such thoroughness and efficiency.

Census data can be likened to looking into a prism, illustrating the striking diversity of our communities and our geography, keeping tabs on trends in our economy, enabling us to plan strategically and to make sensible decisions regarding our future.

But the value - beyond measurement in dollar terms - of accurate and reliable data is too often taken for granted.

Comprehensive and accurate statistics are essential in supporting our democratic institutions and in helping governments make policy decisions on an informed basis.

We are fortunate in Australia to have an organisation as professional as the ABS in furnishing both our decision makers and the public with relevant, accurate data.

The Year Book is a detailed, comprehensive and up to date picture of Australia and Australians, providing a wealth of information in one handy volume.

There is vital information on the performance of the economy, government spending, industrial output, international investment, the labour market, population, education, health and many other subjects.

Its 745 pages tell us a lot about ourselves. For example;

- Over the past five years from 2000 to 2005, Brisbane was our fastest growing capital with an average annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent. But, as will come as no surprise to Western Australians, the coastal city of Mandurah south of Perth outpaced all our capitals, as well as Queensland's Gold Coast, with a growth rate of 5.1 per cent.
- Life expectancy for most Australians continues to be among the highest in the world at 78.1 years on average for men and 83 years for women, while our infant mortality rate of 4.9 deaths per 1000

births is among the lowest in the world.

However, the Year Book provides a stark reminder that the challenges of indigenous health remain substantial when we note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a life expectancy around 17 years lower than the norm and Aboriginal infant mortality continues to be disturbing; as high as 15.4 deaths per 1000 live births in some parts of Australia.

Also of concern are some unhealthy lifestyle practices common to all Australians when almost one in four adults still smoke, 13 per cent consume alcohol at levels that pose a risk to health and 52 per cent of the population aged 15 or over have been classified as overweight or obese.

In keeping with tradition, each new edition of the Year Book highlights selected themes of particular relevance to Australian life; for 2007, they are - Surf Lifesaving and Antarctica.

2007 has been declared the Year of the Surf Lifesaver to honour 100 years of continuous service to the nation by the volunteer surf lifesaving movement, which interestingly began right here at Bondi.

It is noteworthy that in the 80 years since records have been kept, Australian surf lifesavers have rescued more than 500,000 people and that not one life has been lost between the flags; an incredible achievement.

2007/2008 has been declared International Polar Year by the International Council for Science and the World Meteorological Organisation. This international focus will, in part, highlight the prominent role Australia and Australians have played in Antarctica over the last century.

Australians of the ilk of Douglas Mawson, Frank Hurley and Phil Law have been at the forefront of Antarctic research, which, over six decades has revealed that what happens in Antarctica has a major impact on the earth's climate and indeed its food chains.

Mawson's courage in pioneering this research involved incredible personal endurance, including his epic 1912-13 sled ride, in which his two companions died. One slid into a crevasse and disappeared with most of the food; his other companion died of malnutrition and food poisoning.

Mawson battled on alone for more than 160 kilometres. He was experiencing great suffering but refused to give in, cutting his sled in half with a pocket saw so he could drag it unaided.

It took him 30 days to make it back to Main Base where he arrived in time to see his ship steaming away, leaving him stranded with six others for another year. However the quality of the information he gathered, led to his expedition being described by the British author J. Gordon Hayes as the "greatest and most consummate expedition that ever sailed for Antarctica."

Mawson's courage in completing his task fired the imagination of the public.

This year expeditioners wintering in Australia's Antarctic territory went online to complete their forms for Census night, taking advantage of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' new eCensus option.

For the first time in history, Census information from Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island stations was collected in a matter of hours. Previously the paper Census forms could only be processed once they were physically shipped out on the summer resupply voyages at the end of the year.

So it is that the centenary of Surf Life Saving and of our research activities in the Antarctic serve to remind us of the inspirational nature behind some statistics.

So well done to the ABS and all involved in the completion of such a comprehensive and important publication;

And now it now gives me great pleasure to launch the 2007 Year Book Australia, appropriately assisted by lead surf lifesaver, Michael "MJ" Bates and his team.

